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Why infants are baptized

WHY INFANTS ARE BAPTIZED

AN ESSAY BY

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To

The Abiding Memory

of

One whose Faith in the Covenant

herein portrayed

She lived to see abundantly rewarded.

PREFATORY NOTE

THE substance of the following essay was published a number of years ago in the Princeton Review.

It has been revised and enlarged and is now reprinted in the hope that it may prove of service to some who, while valuing on account of ancestral tradition and tender associations the privilege of presenting their infant children for baptism, are yet troubled with doubts as to the meaning of the sacrament in such cases and its value to the recipient.

It is hoped that it will be sufficiently evident even to those who dissent from the views expressed that they are not advocated in any controversial spirit.

E. N. W.

New York, September 1, 1900.

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WHY INFANTS ARE BAPTIZED

Introduction

TWO sacraments only, baptism and the Lord's supper, are accepted by Protestant Christendom as of divine appointment.

In regard to one of these, the Lord's supper, it is universally admitted that a certain degree of knowledge and therefore of conscious preparation upon the part of the recipient are necessary. Not unnaturally therefore a question arises, and to some minds assumes grave importance, whether the same is not true in regard to the other sacrament, namely, that of baptism. It is true that a marked distinction is immediately obvious: in the one sacrament the disciple is the active participant; in the other he is the passive

recipient. Yet inasmuch as even in the latter case there may be either a voluntary or an involuntary recipiency the question still remains.

The experience of all pastors will doubtless agree that they find in their congregations parents who are earnest and conscientious in their desire to fulfill their duty to the children whom God has committed to their care and who recognize the fact that the standards of the Church instruct them to present their infant children for the sacrament of baptism, but who confess that doubts disturb their minds as to the meaning and efficacy of the sacrament when administered to newborn babes. They are still further disquieted by the knowledge that many excellent Christians composing, at least in this country, a large and influential branch of the Church universal, unhesitatingly deny the propriety of such administration and assert that the baptism of infants is a meaningless form. How shall such questions be met ?

It must be frankly admitted that many who accept the practice assign reasons for it which tend rather to increase than allay the doubts of inquirers. There can be little question that whether from this cause or from the failure of adequate direct instruction there is a wide diversity of opinion as to the significance of the sacrament when administered to infants and consequently as to the relation of baptized children to the Church. That this should tend to neglect in practice is not strange, and a comparison of the number of such baptisms with the number of communicants, at least as reported in the statistics of the Presbyterian Church, seems to indicate that neglect is far from uncommon.

The popular misapprehension upon this subject is also manifest in the frequency with which the first approach of baptized children to the communion table is described as their "joining the Church" or "uniting with the Church;" phrases

which by their common use, even by teachers and pastors, have doubtless had much to do with obscuring the plain teaching of the Scriptures and the standards of the Church. In short, so long as the significance of the baptism of infants is in dispute among those who advocate it and the position of baptized children is looked upon as anomalous and undetermined, so long our church members and especially the more intelligent and thoughtful among them will be tempted to look upon the sacrament lightly and to be careless in regard to its administration to their children.

Nevertheless, were a growing divergence of theories the only result of such misconception it would be a matter of comparatively small importance and one which the present writer would feel far less interest in discussing. The mere question of the prevalence or neglect of the practice as an ecclesiastical rite sinks into insignificance unless the sacrament is

seen to be symbolical of most profound truths and of precious spiritual privileges. But as a fact the whole question of the manner in which our children shall be instructed and trained is determined by the views held as to the significance of their baptism and their consequent relation to the Church. It is because of its important bearing upon the teaching of our pulpits and the Christian nurture of immortal souls that this subject should attract earnest and prayerful consideration.

It is with such convictions that the present writer hopes that a simple restatement of the grounds upon which, in accordance with the teaching of the Scriptures, the sacrament of baptism is to be administered to infants, may prove timely and of interest to those to whom God has committed the care and nurture of the children of the Church.

I

One Baptism

IT is not proposed at the present time to enumerate the various conflicting views which in the supposed interests of spiritual life have been advanced in our Protestant non-ritualistic churches.

It is sufficient to say that both the history and the experience of the Church abundantly prove that any theory that assigns to the sacrament of baptism in the case of infants a different significance from that in the case of adults, or that admits that baptized children are not in the full sense of the words "members of the Church" will be found unsatisfactory and, if consistently acted upon, will inevitably lead to indifference to the privilege and irrepressible doubt as to the propriety of baptizing infants at all.

The reason is obvious. Such a view, making baptism in the case of the infant to mean something other and different from baptism in the case of the adult, and assigning the baptized adult to one position and the baptized child to another, necessarily assumes either that such distinction, which virtually establishes in the Church *two* baptisms, is enjoined in the Scriptures, or that we have no divinely expressed warrant for administering the sacrament to infants, and must depend upon analogy, tradition, precedent, or an apostolic example, which is in dispute, to justify our practice.

As the first position is obviously untenable, the second is to a great extent practically accepted. Indeed, it is frequently admitted, with prompt ingenuousness, that the Bible contains no direct command to baptize infants. After this concession, however ingeniously such baptism may be defended upon the grounds of "time-honored custom," the "authority of the

Church," the "edification of parents," or the "beauty of a consecratory rite," the way, among Protestants, to carelessness and neglect is very short and easy.

In contradistinction to this we find two classes of believers whose practice invariably accords with their doctrine; upon the one side those who hold that infants are regenerated, *ex opere operato*, by baptism; upon the other, those who believe that baptism concerns only conscious believers. In each of these cases the practice is the necessary logical result of a definite and pronounced theory, and the theories, though antipodal, agree in the position from which they start, namely, that the sacrament of baptism as found in the Scriptures is *single*, that its significance is in all cases the same, and that the inspired statements concerning qualifications in the recipient apply alike to all candidates.

In the conviction that, however wrong the conclusions, this fundamental position

is sound and essential to any tenable view of the significance of this sacrament, it will be attempted, in consistency with it, to show, upon the one hand, that the Scripture precepts as distinctly command the baptism of infants as that of adults; and, upon the other, that this position, involving, as it does, the church membership of such infants, can be held without embracing the ritualistic views of the Romish or the High Anglican party.

In taking this position no novel ideas are advanced. It is believed to be the only position that is consistent with the history of our Church* and with its standards.

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* The Presbyterian Church, of which the writer is a member.

II

The Teaching of the Scriptures

IT would be aside from the present purpose and is unnecessary to the argument to review the history of the controversy in regard to the original practice of the Church.* Acknowledging the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and obedience they must be made the sole standard of appeal in regard to the purport of this sacrament and the character of those to whom it is to be administered.

Admitting, then, that the sacrament of baptism in the Christian Church is a positive ordinance, and that as such we have no right to tamper with its significance, we turn to the great commission:—

"Go ye therefore, and teach (μαθητεύ-

* See Appendix, Note A.

σατε, disciple) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost : teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

The command μαθητεύσατε, "make disciples of" is explained by the latter clause, "baptizing them," etc. The verb signifies the end, the participle the means. In regard to this scholars are virtually agreed.* Nothing is said of qualifications either of character or of age. These are to be determined by other expressions of Scripture. As "all nations" necessarily include many who are not to become disciples, so, of course, they include infants, and the question whether infants are to be "discipled" must be decided upon the

* The verb, μαθητεύειν, signifies *to make* disciples; it includes baptism and teaching.—*Bengel.*

The μαθητεύειν consists of two parts—the *initiatory*, admissory *rite*, and the subsequent teaching.—*Alford.*

The two participles, βαπτίζοντες and διδάσκοντες, are precisely what constitute the μαθητεύειν.—*Olshausen.*

"*Disciple all the nations, immersing them,*" etc.—Version of Bib. Union.

same grounds as the question in the case of adults.

Obviously the answer in both instances depends upon the conditions that the Scriptures elsewhere make prerequisite to the reception of the sacrament of baptism and the possibility of such conditions being fulfilled in infants.

Two questions, then, cover the whole ground of our inquiry:—

What conditions in the recipient are prerequisite to baptism?

Are these conditions in any case fulfilled in infants?

I. What conditions in the recipient are prerequisite to baptism?

These conditions depend upon the significance of the sacrament.

What, then, is its significance?

1. Baptism is the *official initiatory rite* of the visible Church.

This is its significance as an external, formal ceremony, and as such it is to be

distinguished from certain other outward acts that may or may not be coincident in point of time.

Thus baptism is not necessarily that public confession of Christ before men which our Lord so pointedly commands. Of course, it may, and often does, involve *a* public confession, just as in many cases does the sacrament of the Lord's supper, but this public confession does not belong to the essence of either sacrament. The solemn words: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven," cannot refer to baptism, because at the time they were spoken the commission to baptize had not been given, and because the confession upon earth is parallel to the confession in heaven. In not one of the eight or ten passages in the Scriptures descriptive of baptism is there any reference to such public confession.

So, too, the distinction between the "*initiatory rite*" and the "*door*" of the Church is to be observed. Entrance may be, indeed, coincident with baptism, but it is not necessarily so. The Church, as we shall see, antedates the present dispensation, and the first Jewish converts were already within its fold. The corresponding sacrament under the former dispensation was administered to those who were already of the number of the chosen people. The men at Ephesus whom Paul baptized are distinctly called "certain disciples."

The door of the Church stands always open to those who would join themselves to God's people. He who has openly declared himself upon the Lord's side has, in reality, entered the visible kingdom of God, even though he does not, upon the instant, receive the formal initiatory sacrament. To insist, as the Roman Catholic Church does, that only by baptism can the Church be entered, requires logically,

by a consistent interpretation of Scripture, the further assertion, which she also does not hesitate to make, that only by this sacrament can there be regeneration. The figure used by the late Rev. F. W. Robertson, of Brighton, in reference to regeneration, is equally applicable to membership. He says: "'In baptism . . . . I was *made* a child of God.' Yes, coronation makes a sovereign; but, paradoxical as it may seem, it can only *make* one a sovereign who is a sovereign already. Similarly with baptism. Baptism makes a child of God in the sense in which coronation makes a king."*

But though baptism does not necessarily and always first *introduce* the recipient into the visible Church, i. e., "among those who profess the true religion and their children," it is, as the *official initiatory rite*, the "sign and seal" of his membership.

This is sufficiently shown by the form

* *Sermons.* Second series: Sermon IV.

of the commission: "Go ye therefore, and disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." We have already spoken of the explanatory nature of the second clause. Thus discipleship was to be sealed. It is also approved by the apparently universal practice of the apostles and evangelists of baptizing "straightway" all who became disciples.

2. Baptism symbolizes and thus presupposes that radical change in the soul which we commonly call "regeneration."*

"Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." John iii. 5.† The symbolism

* "By a consent almost universal the word regeneration is now used to designate not the whole work of sanctification, nor the first stages of that work comprehended in conversion, much less justification or any mere external change of state, but the instantaneous change from spiritual death to spiritual life."—*Hodge's Theol.*, Vol. iii, p. 5. See Appendix, Note B.

† It has been disputed whether there is any reference in this passage to *baptism*. Calvin says: "They are in error in imagining that there is any mention of baptism in this passage, merely because the word water is used. Nico-

is sometimes of cleansing, sometimes of burial and resurrection.

The most prominent passages are:—

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." Acts ii. 38.

"Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Acts xxii. 16.

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Rom. vi. 3, 4.

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demus, after our Saviour had explained to him the corruption of nature and the necessity of being born again, kept dreaming of a corporeal birth, and hence our Saviour intimates the mode in which God regenerates us, viz.: by water and the Spirit; in other words, by the Spirit, who, in irrigating and cleansing the souls of believers, operates in the manner of water. By 'water and the Spirit,' therefore, I simply understand the Spirit, which is water."—*Institut.*, IV., xvi, 25.

"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Gal. iii. 27.

"Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." Col. ii. 12.

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above." Col. iii. 1.

"According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost." Tit. iii. 5.

In regard to the meaning of "believing," once coupled in a general statement with baptism, namely, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark xvi. 16), it is to be said that it must be interpreted in the light of the foregoing passages. It must refer, not exclusively to a conscious conviction of the intellect, but also to a state of the soul, to what was formerly termed the "spiritual habit." If it involves necessarily a conscious convic-

tion of the mind, no infant dying before years of understanding can be saved, for it is added, "He that believeth not shall be damned."

There is no escape from this conclusion, excepting in the singular and startling position of one prominent opponent of the baptism of infants: "The gospel has nothing to do with infants."

The passages that have been cited, and indeed all texts that speak of the significance of baptism, seem to agree that an inward change is symbolized. It is not to be assumed that such inward change has, as a matter of fact, invariably and in every case taken place. Under the most searching examination of adults there would be doubtless received some who were hypocrites or self-deceived ; but none the less the change is symbolized and presumed. This is generally admitted, even though there is a difference of opinion as to the nature of the change, or an intimation that there may be another use and signifi-

cance of baptism not specified in the Scriptures.

So distinct indeed are these utterances of the word of God that many Christians, mistaking, as we contend, the very common figure by which the properties and effects of the thing *signified* are attributed to the *sign*, have assumed that baptism, *ex opere operato*, imparts regeneration. It has been already intimated that the interpretation which makes baptism necessarily the *door* instead of the *sign* of entrance must logically make it also the *means* instead of the sign of regeneration.

3. Baptism, as a sacrament, is an instrument and medium through which the Holy Ghost conveys to those by whom it is worthily received spiritual grace.

This is clearly taught in all the symbols of the Church, Reformed as well as Roman, although there is not always a distinction made between the act of the Holy Ghost in transforming the soul, which act may or may not be synchronous with bap-

tism, and the further spiritual gift of enlightenment and enlargement which is conveyed to those who rightly receive the sacrament. This latter is parallel to the spiritual grace received by those who worthily partake of the Lord's supper. "Thus Luther observes that the grace of baptism is not a thing transient and confined to the moment, but which, if cultivated, remains and renovates through the whole course of life." *

That baptism is such an instrument and medium of the Holy Ghost is to be inferred from the frequent connection in the Scriptures of the ideas of baptism with water and with the Spirit.

The words of John the Baptist, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matt. iii. 11), seem to refer to the distinction between

* *Expos. Thirty-nine Art.*, Browne, p. 644.

a "baptism unto repentance" and the sacrament of Christian baptism which was to be a sign and a seal of the baptism of the Spirit.

Repentance (μετάνοια) depends upon the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit; yet Peter, upon the day of Pentecost, said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye *shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*." Acts ii. 38.

Again, after the preaching of Paul at Ephesus, certain disciples who had long believed "were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them." Acts xix. 5, 6.

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." 1 Cor. xii. 13.

That grace of some sort is conveyed to those who worthily receive baptism is denied only by those who hold the very lowest view of the sacraments.

Baptism, therefore, is not only a sign

and seal, "it is also a means of grace, because in it the blessings which it signifies are conveyed, and the promises of which it is the seal are assured or fulfilled to those who are baptized, provided they believe. Unless the recipient of this sacrament be insincere, baptism is an act of faith; it is an act in which and by which he receives and appropriates the offered benefits of the redemption of Christ." *

If our view of the significance of baptism is correct; if it is the *official initiatory rite* of the visible Church, the *symbol of regeneration* and a sacramental *medium of spiritual grace*, then it follows that the conditions in the recipient prerequisite to its administration are:—

1. *Membership in the visible Church.*
2. *Presumptive regeneration.*
3. *Capability of receiving spiritual grace.*

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* *Hodge's Theology*, Vol. iii, p. 589.

II. Do infants in any case fulfill these conditions?

Upon the answer to this question the controversy in regard to the baptism of infants turns. If infants do not fulfill these conditions, then the special commands in regard to baptism have no relation to them. If in any case they *do* fulfill the conditions, then in such case they are numbered among those whom we are directly commanded to baptize. As a matter of fact, those Christians who reject infant baptism (technically so called) baptize children as soon as they give satisfactory evidence that they have fulfilled the necessary conditions—thus making *fitness*, not age, the test.

That children of believing church members may from earliest infancy fulfill these conditions is, in our view, the ground upon which it is to be argued that they are entitled to receive the sacrament of baptism.

First Condition—Membership in the visible Church.

The children of church members have a *birthright* in the visible Church.

This is to be inferred:—

1. From the divine institution of the family.

(*a*) The *family*, not the individual, is the unit of the race.

The *homo*—man—is not male or female, but represents the male and female in their mutual interdependence—the germ of the family. "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; *male and female* created he them." Gen. i. 27. Children at birth and in infancy are wholly dependent upon their parents. Literal independence of the individual is unknown and impossible.

(*b*) Justly or unjustly, in all ordinary cases, as a matter of fact, the children's position at birth is determined by that of the parents. It is necessarily so in the family and in the State, which with the Church make up the three organizations among men that are of divine appoint-

ment. It is so, largely in physical and mental gifts, in moral aptitudes, in social position, in political status.

(*c*) In the most momentous transaction —excepting the atonement—that the world has ever seen, this unity of the family was divinely announced. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that (ἐφ' ᾧ) all have sinned." Rom. v. 12.

It is natural law—we may say "common law"—in God's arrangement of human society, that antecedent to their own accountability, the position of children is largely determined by that of their parents, and if no statute law is found making an exception, the common law holds good in reference to the Church.

2. The birthright in the visible Church of such children is to be inferred from their position under former dispensations.

(*a*) The Church of God is one in all ages.

(1) From its *constitution*. God and man are always the parties concerned. Faith is

always the condition of salvation. The sacraments are of like signification. The one Son of God, the one sacrifice for sin, the one glorious destiny, are always the central facts.

(2) *Historically.* Prophecy declares that the Church shall be enlarged, not changed—e. g., "Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted. . . . . Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth. . . . . The children which thou shalt have, after thou hast lost the other, shall say again in thine ears, The place is too strait for me: give place to me that I may dwell. . . . . Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they

shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders." Isaiah xlix. 13–22. So also the whole of the chapter (Isaiah lx.) commencing "Arise, shine; for thy light is come," and many other passages that might be cited.

Christ was crucified before the old dispensation had passed away.

(3) *Scripturally.* "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, ... that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Gal. iii. 13, 14. "And this I say, that the covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect." Gal. iii. 17. That is, the Jewish polity may come and go, but cannot affect the covenant. "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." Gal. iii. 9.

Paul elsewhere teaches distinctly that the Church, instead of being abrogated, remains the same through all change, the Jewish branches being cut off, the Gentile branches being grafted in; and that hereafter the Jews are to be restored, not to a new body, but to their own "olive-tree." Compare Rom. xi. 18–24; Eph. ii. 11–22. To the same effect is the whole tenor of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

(*b*) Children are distinctly declared to be members, with their parents, of the Church under former dispensations.

So far as the Church was organized and developed in the earliest ages, we find this apparently true, and when, in the time of Abraham, it was specifically set apart from the world, we find the principle established by direct statute: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an *everlasting covenant*, *to be a God unto thee*, *and to thy seed after thee*." Gen. xvii. 7. The seal of

that covenant was circumcision, and by the administration of this sacrament the children were publicly proclaimed members of the household of faith.

The same principle was again and again announced when the children of Israel, under the Mosaic law, were still more definitely separated from the rest of the world. The law of circumcision was more than a mere civil regulation. The act was a religious transaction belonging to the Church, of which the terms of membership (viz., faith) were the same as under the later dispensation. "He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised." Rom. iv. 11. "For the promise . . . . was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith." Rom. iv. 13.

The question has been sometimes raised why this sacrament should have been so ordered as to be administered

only to males. The reason seems to be that in a day when the leadership of the family was so distinctly emphasized, it was enough that the man, as the representative of his family, should receive the seal of the covenant. Male infants were prospective representatives of families. That, under the present dispensation, the sacrament should be administered to both sexes is simply in accordance with the change that all admit has taken place under the gospel in the social position of women. The argument does not here turn upon the fact that infants were *circumcised*, but upon the anterior fact, proved by their circumcision, that they had a *birthright* in the Church. This, of course, was as true of female as of male children.

If then the Church is identical in all ages and under all dispensations, and if in former days the children of believing parents had a birthright in the Church, the argument is *a fortiori* that such children still enjoy such birthright. Presump-

tively the Church under the gospel would not be narrower than under the law. The only ground upon which this conclusion can be obviated is that they are deprived by express statute of their ancient privileges.

3. That the children of church members have a birthright in the visible Church is implied in direct Scripture statements.

It is self-evident that such statements are capable of being differently interpreted or misunderstood, or there would be no conflict of opinion among honest, intelligent students. We cite:—

(*a*) All of the very numerous statements that children are blessed for their parents' sake, e. g., the second commandment: "showing mercy unto thousands (i. e., generations) of them that serve me."

"O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and *with their children* forever!" Deut. v. 29.

"For they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and *their offspring with them.*" Isaiah lxv. 23.

"They shall remember me in far countries; and they shall live *with their children*, and turn again." Zech. x. 9.

"And they shall dwell therein, even they, and *their children*, and their *children's children* forever: and my servant David shall be their prince forever." Ezek. xxxvii. 25.

"For the promise is unto you, and to your children." Acts ii. 39.

(*b*) Such suggestive statements as that Jesus blessed little children (βρέφη new born babes), (Matt. xix. 14; Luke xviii. 15, 16); that he said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven," i. e., the visible Church under the new dispensation; that he directed Peter to feed the "lambs" as well as the sheep. John xxi. 15–17.

(*c*) The distinct announcement: "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanc-

tified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy (ἁγιά). 1 Cor. vii. 14.

Ἅγιος and ἅγιοι are the common designation of Christians, referred to as *Church members.* Acts ix. 13, 32; xxvi. 10; Rom. i. 7; 1 Cor. i. 2, etc. In the text under consideration the same term is applied to the *children.*

It has been objected with apparent force that as the "unbelieving wife" or "husband" is said to be sanctified (ἡγίασται) that the same reasoning would involve the church-membership of the adult unbeliever. It is to be remembered, however, that the force of the passage for our present purpose lies in the fact that the reference to the children is only *incidental.* The apostle is not discussing the position of children nor arguing that *they* are ἁγιά. He *assumes* it as a fact universally admitted, and from it argues that the unbelieving wife or husband must be, in this regard, considered as standing in the same

relation to the believing partner as if sanctified. Their *union* is as truly in the Church as if both parties were members. "There is no need," he says in effect, "to put away the unbelieving wife, for she must be in some sense sanctified by her marriage relation, inasmuch as it is an admitted fact that the children are ἅγιά, *holy*—i. e., church members."

The passage seems, therefore, to be perfectly clear in regard to the position of the children, and doubtful only as to what is implied in regard to the unbelieving wife or husband.

Thus, from the divine appointment of the *family relation*, from the *position of children under former dispensations*, and from the distinct *Scripture statements*, we conclude that the children of church members fulfill the first condition prerequisite to baptism: they have *membership* as a birthright *in the visible Church.*

Second Condition—Presumptive Regeneration.

Baptism, as we have seen, symbolizes regeneration, but *presumptive* regeneration is all that we can predicate of any candidate whether old or young. God only reads the heart, and we have reason to believe that all churches contain unworthy members. Among the apostles, called even by the Lord himself, there was a Judas; Paul was forsaken by Demas; and this experience has been repeated in every age.

Thus in regard to the children of believers, it cannot be asked that their regeneration shall be proved as an invariable fact, but only that there shall be proved to be in its favor a presumption such as we deem necessary in the case of adult candidates for the same sacrament.

That there is warrant for such presumption, and that the children of believers are to be treated as regenerate, we argue from the following considerations:—

1. The regeneration of infants is *possible*.

(*a*) Regeneration is a work of the Holy Ghost, transforming the soul. It is the divine side of that great change of which the human side is "repentance" (μετάνοια) or conversion. Logically, the act of God must precede the act of man, although in point of time they may be often coincident. The Holy Ghost can change the heart of the confirmed bigot and persecutor Saul; he can transform, if it pleases him so to do, the moral nature of an infant.

(*b*) A conscious acceptance of Christ at the moment of regeneration is not a necessary accompaniment. We believe that all children dying in unconscious infancy are saved. They enter heaven only as redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and as with a moral nature transformed by the power of the Holy Ghost. Their first conscious thought must be in harmony with the will of God, but the great moral change—their regeneration

—preceded it while they were still unconscious.*

2. This moral change wrought by the Holy Ghost is *credible* in the case of the children of believers.

(*a*) Because it is spiritually parallel to church membership, the proof of which in their case has been already cited. If the external relationship is permitted, the higher *spiritual* relationship that alone gives it value may be expected.

(*b*) Because of the reiterated promises that children shall be blessed spiritually as well as temporally with their parents.

(*c*) Because there is no limit to the spiritual blessings that God vouchsafes in answer to the prayer of faith.

Certainly it would be an incomparable spiritual blessing were our children re-

* "Moreover infants who are to be saved (and that some are saved at this age is certain) must, without question, be previously regenerated by the Lord. For if they bring innate corruption with them from their mother's womb, they must be purified before they can be admitted into the kingdom of God, into which shall not enter anything that defileth."—*Calvin, Institut.*, iv. xvi. 1. See Appendix, Note C.

generate from the very hour of birth. There is no spiritual gift which is *possible* for which we are not encouraged to pray in hope of a response from on high. As this blessing is plainly *possible*, it becomes a duty to pray for it, and if we do thus pray in faith, have we not every assurance that our prayer will be heard ?

(*d*) Because faithful training, which is one of the divinely appointed means of grace, can be foreseen by God and responded to by an anticipatory blessing.

(*e*) Because in no other way under human instrumentality can the growth of the Church be so certainly assured as by the nurture within her bosom of a godly seed.

3. Not only is the regeneration from earliest infancy of the children of believers *possible* and *credible*, but Scripture expressions encourage us to *expect* it.

"Thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was

cast upon thee from the womb: from my mother's womb, my God art thou." Ps. xxii. 9, 10.

"Thou art my trust from my youth. By thee have I been holden up from the womb." Ps. lxxi. 5, 6.

"And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed." Mal. ii. 15.

"And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up (ἐκτρέφετε) in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Eph. vi. 4.

Of John it is said, "He shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb" (Luke i. 15); of Jeremiah, "Before I formed thee . . . . I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." Jer. i. 5.

4. *Facts in the Church* favor the belief that the children of believers are to be

presumed regenerate till the contrary appears.

(*a*) Scripture examples are many. We read of Samuel (1 Sam. i. 27, 28; ii. 11, 18, 26; iii. 1); of Jeremiah (Jer. i. 5); of John the Baptist. Luke i. 15.

(*b*) Where parents pray in faith for the presence of the Holy Spirit upon their children, are watchful in Christian nurture and look for the evidences of a spiritual change, ordinarily they are not disappointed. They do not indeed find their children free from temptation, folly, and sin, any more than they find the adult Christian perfectly sanctified; but they do *not* ordinarily find their children committed to the service of the devil. On the other hand, they find their earliest emotions drawn out toward God with sincere desire to do his will. There is no Christian who has not seen such instances and rejoiced in them. The reason, alas! that they are not more frequent is that very seldom do parents have such faith; and

still more rarely do they train their offspring as young Christians within the Church of God.

(*c*) The great majority of those who confess Christ before men are children of Christian parents. So true is this that, notwithstanding the want of faith upon the part of parents and their neglect of true Christian nurture, there is little risk in saying that the spiritual condition at twenty years of age, of any given number of children of Christian parents, would compare favorably with the condition, twenty years after baptism, of the same number of persons presumptively *converted* and baptized in adult years.

5. All Churches that baptize infants do so upon the ground that they may be regenerated in infancy.

This is of course true of those Churches (the Roman and Greek*) which hold that

* The Greek Church baptizes infants, but at the same time insists upon *immersion* as the proper mode, thus indicating that there is no necessary connection, as some seem to think, between restriction in reference to the sub-

the sacraments convey spiritual grace *ex opere operato;* but it is equally true of the different branches of the Reformed Church which most earnestly deny that any such efficacy is inherent in the sacrament itself.

The Protestant Episcopal Church teaches (Art. 27): "Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference, but is also a sign of regeneration or New Birth." In the Baptismal Office the words are used "Seeing that this child is regenerate,* and grafted into the body of Christ's Church." This is often construed to mean more than we have maintained; it certainly means no less.

The Methodist Episcopal Church repeats essentially (Art. 17) the 27th Article of the Episcopal Church.

The Rev. Mr. Hibbard, in a work that has the endorsement of the Methodist Book Concern, says: "In the following

jects and restriction in regard to mode. See Appendix, Note D.

* See Appendix, Note E.

treatise I have assumed that infants are in a regenerated state," (p. 5) and again, "Infants are in a gracious state. . . . . Baptism is an outward sign of an inward work of grace, ... a token of confirmation that the subject belongs to the spiritual family of God. All who belong to the spiritual family of God are entitled to baptism" (p. 89).

The Lutheran Church holds that "The regeneration or new life implanted by means of baptism in the case of an infant is the gracious presence and activity of God in the Holy Ghost. The infant does not resist the work of the Holy Ghost, and when therefore grace is offered in baptism there is divinely wrought a receptivity of grace. The baptismal grace bestowed on infants, however, first comes into exercise through self-conscious repentance and faith." *Standards, as quoted in the Lutheran Cyclopædia.*

The Church of the United Brethren (Moravian) teaches in the Litany at Bap-

tism of Children: "Baptism is the answer of a good conscience toward God, who hath saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which is shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Children, also, may be made partakers of this grace." The Heidelberg Catechism teaches (Ques. 74): "Are infants also to be baptized? Yes; for since they, as well as the adult, are included in the covenant and Church of God, and since redemption from sin by the blood of Christ and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is *promised to them no less than to the adult;* they must, therefore," etc.

The Dordrecht Confession of Faith teaches (Art. 34): "And indeed Christ shed his blood no less for the washing of the children of the faithful than for the adult persons; and, therefore, they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of that which Christ hath done for them."

The Westminster Confession of Faith

having explained (Chap. 28, Sec. I) that "Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of *regeneration* . . . . , and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life," proceeds to say (Sec. IV): "Not only those that do actually profess faith in, and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one or both believing parents are to be baptized." (Sec. VI) "The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time."

In the Directory for Worship in the Presbyterian Church, the minister is enjoined to explain before baptism "That it is instituted by Christ; that it is a seal of the righteousness of faith: that the seed of the faithful have no less a right to this ordinance, under the gospel, than the seed of Abraham to circumcision, under the Old Testament; that Christ commanded all nations to be baptized; that he blessed little children, declaring that of such is the kingdom of heaven; that children are *federally holy*, and therefore ought to be baptized; that we are, by nature, sinful, guilty, and polluted, and have need of cleansing by the blood of Christ, and by the sanctifying influences of the Spirit of God."

These quotations will suffice to show that among the standards of all churches which baptize infants there is a virtual agreement in regard to the significance of the sacrament in their case, and the assumption upon which it is to be adminis-

tered. This assumption, be it remembered, is not that in every instance regenerating grace has been certainly accorded. This supposition is as impossible as in the face of facts to assume that all adult candidates will prove to have truly received the grace of God, or that all professors will be literally "*saints*" (ἅγιοι—holy ones); but as sacraments and ordinances are framed for a Church in its normal condition, so the children of believers may as properly be treated as regenerate, which they certainly would be were their parents in the full sense of the word "holy," as the parents themselves may still be called, even by apostolic wisdom, "*saints*."

Inasmuch, therefore, as the regeneration in earliest infancy of the children of believers is not only *possible* but *credible;* as the presumption of it is implied in certain *Scripture statements*, and in many instances *manifests itself as a fact;* and as it is, in the ways indicated, assumed in the

standards of such Churches as permit the baptism of infants, the conclusion is a just one that the children of believers fulfill the *second condition* prerequisite to baptism,—they are *presumptively regenerate.*

Third condition—Capability of receiving spiritual grace.

If the conclusions already reached are just, it is unnecessary to argue at length that infants may be made recipients of spiritual grace. There have been many discussions concerning the nature of original sin and the possibility of innate guilt, but the generally received Catholic view always has been that every soul possesses a *moral character of some kind* antecedent to its actual conscious choices. Thus by changes wrought in that moral character every soul, even before self-consciousness, is capable of receiving spiritual grace; and infants, when brought by believing parents to the sacrament of baptism, may receive or may have already re-

ceived that promised grace which, in the words of the Westminster Confession, is "not only offered but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time."

Any objection to this view, that special blessing, even in the case of infants, may be connected with the actual reception of baptism, applies equally to any conception of the sacraments that looks upon them as more than simply memorial rites.

If special ordinances have been established by the great Head of the Church, and with them certain blessings promised, it will not do to say that, because these blessings are spiritual, it is a matter of indifference whether or not the external ordinance is observed. This is to insult God by dishonoring his commands.

And if the blessing is the free gift of the Holy Spirit, vouchsafed in response to the prayer of faith and the act of obedi-

ence, it may be as certainly looked for when the believing parent, trusting in the abundant promises of God, brings his child to receive the appointed seal of his membership in Christ's Church, as when the full-grown sinner, repenting and turning from the error of his ways, listens to the invitation of the gospel and bows to accept the offered sacrament.

Thus the children of believers fulfill the *third condition* prerequisite to baptism,—they *are capable of receiving spiritual grace.*

If, then, it is true, as we have endeavored to prove, that the infant children of believers fulfill all the conditions prerequisite to baptism—namely, membership in the visible Church, presumptive regeneration, and capability of receiving spiritual grace—then it follows that *we have as distinct divine command to baptize such infants as to baptize adult believers.*

III.

Scripture References.

THE conclusions at which we thus arrive from the study of the meaning of the sacrament and of the qualifications of its recipients, as revealed in the Scriptures, is confirmed by the incidental references in apostolic history and in the inspired epistles.

There are but seven cases recorded of baptisms of individuals designated by name. In *two* instances, those of Paul and the Ethiopian eunuch, there could have been no question in regard to children. In *three* of the remaining instances—namely, Lydia, the Philippian jailor, and Stephanas—it is expressly stated that with the head of the family the

"*household*" was baptized, while in the cases of Cornelius and Crispus, though no express statement is made, the narrative leads us to the same conclusion. It is, of course, *possible* to assume that in none of these households were there young children, but this is not the natural inference. This specific and *repeated* mention of the baptism of "*households*" leads rather to the conviction that the facts are thus emphasized with the express purpose of establishing the propriety of baptizing the children of believers.

It is to be noticed, too, that Paul, in epistles addressed specifically to "*saints*," includes admonitions to the children. Eph. vi. 1–3; Col. iii. 20.

Indeed, upon any other ground than the apostolic sanction, it seems impossible that the baptism of infants could have obtained the position in the Church that confessedly it held as early as the middle of the third century. See Neander's Ch. History, Vol. i, pp. 311 *et seq.*

There would be at least some record of its introduction and of opposition to the innovation.

IV.

Position in the Church.

IT may also be safely affirmed that the position in the Church of children baptized in infancy is in all respects as favorable to growth in grace as that of those who first enter in adult years. Both alike enter at the hopeful beginning of Christian life. The Church is not simply the home of the sanctified, but of those to be sanctified. It is the place where babes in Christ are to be nurtured and developed until they "come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

The adult no more than the infant is a

perfected saint. The one question is whether he believes upon the Lord Jesus Christ. He is welcomed, even though he be ignorant in regard to many points of doctrinal belief, very imperfect in moral character, and entirely undisciplined in the duties of Christian life. Indeed there is, humanly speaking, greater risk involved in undertaking his future Christian nurture than that of the child born of Christian parents, guarded and cherished by their watchful love, strengthened by their prayers, and thus developing and growing up from tender infancy within the sacred pale of the Church.

We may add that the principles which we believe thus to establish the duty of infant baptism also apply in their general form to those cases where children are presented by Christians who, though not the parents, are willing and able to take their place—to stand *in loco parentis*—and assume to the full extent the obligations of the Christian nurture of the infant dis-

ciple. This quasi-parental relation is the true foundation of what is sometimes termed "household baptism."

It seems also to be the ground upon which originally *sponsors* were required. The custom had its rise in the time of persecution, when Christian parents were liable to be torn away from their infant children, and some assurance was needed that those thus bereft of their natural guardians would not be allowed to lapse into idolatry. In the Protestant Episcopal Church, where this custom is still continued, it is assumed that the sponsors are themselves true believers and are willing and able to care for the spiritual nurture of the child in whose name they have confessed the Christian faith.*

* See Office for the "Ministration of Public Baptism of Infants," *Prot. Epis. Prayer Book.*

V

Objections

IT seems proper, in order to complete the consideration of this subject, to refer somewhat in detail to objections that, with more or less force, are urged against the baptism of infants.

The following include those most commonly proposed:

1. Baptism can do an unconscious babe no good.

With equal truth it may be said, baptism does the adult "*no good.*" Immediate moral effect upon the recipient is not the prime end and object of the sacrament. In the case of the infant, as in that of the adult, it indicates a relationship to the Church and symbolizes a spiritual state.

So far as spiritual grace is imparted in the sacrament, it may be as truly conferred in the one case as in the other, and so far as promises of Christian life are concerned, the parents speak for the child.

2. The Church is a voluntary association. It is not fair to put children therein without their consent.

The question whether the Church is necessarily in every case a "voluntary association" is at issue. The great majority of Christians do not believe that it is. If it is not fair that children should be so placed without their consent, still it is just what God permits in every other relation of life. Under the working of the great natural laws that for the wisest purpose he has ordained, one is born here, another there; one in a palace, another in a hovel; one in a Christian family, another in the home of a profligate or a criminal. Strangely enough, as some may think, children are not even consulted as to whether they shall be born at all. God

orders our lives in accordance with far-reaching plans, often far beyond our comprehension.

3. The view presented makes a distinction between children equally innocent in the sight of God.

It does not hold that the children of believers are by nature, aside from the operation of the Spirit, any better than other children.

It simply acknowledges *facts* that must be faced. The children of a Christian certainly are, ordinarily, born to the enjoyment of special advantages and privileges. If the parents are sincere, the children have their prayers, their faithful training, their tender counsel. Nurtured amid all the advantages of the associations of the Church, the probabilities, humanly speaking, of such children developing as Christians are almost infinitely greater than if they were children of heathen or of godless people. Is any greater distinction made in saying that they are born within the pale of

the Church? The expression simply sums up the facts.

4. This view savors of "baptismal regeneration."

On the other hand, it teaches just the opposite doctrine. The theory commonly called that of "*baptismal regeneration*" holds that by virtue of the application of water in the name of the Trinity the sacrament becomes, *ex opere operato*, the efficacious means of regeneration.

The view here presented looks upon the application of water in the sacrament as symbolizing the change already presumptively accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit. Here adults and infants stand upon precisely the same ground. While in both cases regeneration is the presumption, in neither case is it assumed as invariably or certainly accomplished. Nor do we in the one case more than in the other rebaptize those who, having lapsed into sin, are in after years, as they suppose for the first time, hopefully converted.

5. Whether a child shall grow up a Christian depends largely upon his training. How, then, can he be regenerate antecedent to such influences?

The whole course of each life is from the beginning in the hand of God. The future training as well as the present prayer of faith is known to God. There is no greater mystery involved here than in any other case where God and man are coworkers. It is also true of the adult Christian that his future faithfulness depends largely upon the associations into which he shall be thrown.

6. Under such a system there are church members who have not all the privileges of membership.

Of course; just as there are infant members of a family under tutors and governors; just as there are infant citizens of a State. That under certain circumstances there may be members of the Church who are not entitled to all its privileges must be admitted under any theory, e.g., mem-

bers suspended from communion but not excommunicated. Infant church members, like adult, are entitled to all the privileges they are capable of enjoying. Should an adult member become insane or idiotic he would not cease to be a member because he might be for the time incapable of enjoying all the privileges of the Church.

Our Directory says of children of the Church, "When they come to years of discretion," and are otherwise qualified, "they ought to be informed" (*not* that they then come into any new relationship, but) that "it is their duty and their privilege to come to the Lord's supper."

7. *Many persons are assumed to be members of the Church who in after years give little proof of being Christians.*

Very naturally! while among those who have their children baptized there is such a lamentable want of knowledge, faith and fidelity in training; but the number is much smaller than is frequently alleged. The great majority of the children of the

Church, and especially of those whose spiritual culture has not been plainly neglected, do sooner or later manifest a living hope in Christ. It may be added that many such children, doubtless Christians from infancy, being wrongly instructed, wait, before avowing themselves as such, for some further conscious, sudden change or mysterious experience which never comes, and gradually they fall into the position of backsliding Christians. If the Church were in its normal condition there would be none such, either old or young, for the case of such children finds its precise parallel in that of many baptized in adult years. Some are false to their vows, or were self-deceived What has their baptism availed ?

8. If church members, children who do not live as Christians should be disciplined.

In effect they are. If, when of sufficient years, they refuse to confess Christ, they are virtually suspended from communion. A State might require that all children upon

reaching maturity should take the oath of allegiance. If any refused to do so their rights as citizens would lapse. We have many adult Christians who neglect their privileges as communicants through misconception, morbid self-consciousness, or indifference, remaining for months and even years away from the sacramental table. Ordinarily, if their lives are not scandalous and they seem honest in their misconception, we must content ourselves with advice and private expostulation.

That the children of the Church are often neglected and allowed unrebuked to forget their responsibilities and wander away from spiritual influences is too true, and is a shame and a reproach to the office-bearers of our congregations.

9. By his baptism in infancy the child is defrauded of his privilege of freely choosing, in later years, his position, and thus confessing Christ for himself.

His choice is none the less free because he is surrounded by good influences, because

he receives the blessings of a Christian nurture, because from earliest childhood he feels the sweet attraction of Jesus and recognizes the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In almost all churches, if he becomes in due time a communicant, he does then publicly confess Christ and openly accept for himself the position into which he was born.

10. False hopes are encouraged. Formalism takes the place of spiritual life.

Any doctrine may be misunderstood or abused, but under proper instruction just the opposite is the case. Children are not taught that they are *better*, but that they have greater privileges and responsibilities for which they must render account. For privileges neglected there is heavier condemnation. Their spiritual condition is not determined by any assumption that they are regenerate. If they bring not forth fruits meet for repentance, so much the worse for them.

With equal force it might be said that

the adult Christian will rest upon the fact of his past experience and church membership. But if he proves by his acts that he is *not* a Christian, so much the more reason has he to tremble. So is it also with the youthful church member.

11. Are not the children of Christians who reject infant baptism as frequently blessed as those of parents who accept it?

Obviously such questions cannot be definitely answered. Statistics are as impossible as they would be repugnant to our tenderest emotions, and the possible conclusions of interested witnesses are, for manifest reasons, valueless; but such children might well receive the blessing if their parents were faithful in their nurture, for if the children have a birthright in God's kingdom they would not be necessarily deprived of attendant benefits and privileges because of parental misconception.

On the other hand, it may be added that it is to be feared that among those

who present their children for baptism there are many who have little appreciation of the significance of the sacrament, and consequently little expectation of any resultant blessing.

Inasmuch, however, as blessings are granted in response to faith, if such divergent views were reflected in a consequent attitude of the parents, we should not look with the same confidence for early manifestations of piety in the children of those who believe that some degree of knowledge, education and maturity must *necessarily* precede a change of heart, as in the children of those who accept the divine promise of a holy seed, who believe that their children are with them in the Church, who expect to find them growing up in the fear of the Lord, and who labor with them and pray for them in that blessed hope.

We may add that the experience of churches which, without ignoring the necessity of spiritual life, have emphasized

the meaning and importance of the baptism of infant children, fully justifies us in the opinion that it is no vain thing either in its effect upon parents or children. The Church of Scotland, notwithstanding the disturbing influence of the connection of Church and State, which tended to foster formalism, for many years presented a wonderful spectacle of children, generation after generation, growing up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and in faith and piety walking in the footsteps of their fathers in the house of God.

VI

Importance of Right Views

IF the views expressed in this essay are correct, the subject of the baptism of infants demands a more important place in the minds of pastors and Christian parents than is usually accorded it. As we have already said, this is not a question merely of establishing one theory or another. If, as we firmly believe, there is historically, logically, and scripturally, no tenable middle ground between the position that this sacrament in the case of infants means precisely what it does in the case of adults, and the position that there is no authority whatever for the baptism of infants, then the whole question of the true mode of Christian nurture with its

manifest bearing upon the future growth of the Church, is in our judgment involved in this matter.

Our Baptist brethren very largely owe their success as a denomination to their distinct, unanimous, and consistent utterance upon this subject. Though, as we believe, entirely wrong in their theory of the organization of the Church, yet they have distinctly known upon what principles they have rested, and their trumpet has given forth no uncertain sound. Hence their power with many inquirers. Few such have either opportunity or inclination to examine carefully for themselves, the teachings upon this subject of Church history or the Scriptures.

On the other hand too many of our Protestant and non-ritualistic Churches in their noble protest against that formalism, worldliness, and mere ritualism, which tend to sap spiritual life, and which in New England culminated in the system known as the "*half way covenant*," have assumed

a position that, while nominally retaining the practice of baptizing infants, really emasculates the meaning of the sacrament, or so belittles it that it no longer commands respect.

"The abolition of the abuses of the doctrine of infant church membership, has been accomplished in a manner and in circumstances which have led to the forgetting, ignoring or disowning of that precious truth itself, and the loss of not a little of the sanctifying influence and fruits of holiness that cluster upon it. The consciousness and recognition of the church membership of baptized children have widely disappeared from the doctrinal and practical life of those churches—a fact deplored by some, and denied by none of authority among them."*

It would be a far less evil and fraught with fewer dangers to the future of the Church, to reject altogether the baptism of infants than simply to tolerate it as a

* *Children of the Church*, p. 31.

harmless, edifying, traditional usage, the continuance of which gives periodical opportunity for an affectionate rehearsal of the responsibilities of parents.

Yet this last is no caricature of the position in reference to the sacrament of baptism in the case of infants, of hundreds of members of our Presbyterian and other evangelical churches throughout the land.

On the other hand what gracious fruitage under the divine blessing might well be expected if throughout the Church there were a deep-seated conviction that when infants receive this sacrament they receive in very deed the "sign and the seal of their ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of their giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life"!*

Such conviction could not fail to be followed by an awakening of the Church to its special responsibilities in regard to its infant members. Such children are, as

* *Confession of Faith*, Chap. xviii, Sec. 1.

our Directory expresses it, "*under the inspection and government of the Church.*"

They should be the object of special tenderness and care upon the part of those to whom is committed the feeding of the flock. They should not be expected to grow up to partial maturity outside the "pale of the Church, ' and avowedly committed to the service of the devil. They should receive special instruction in regard to their privileges and responsibilities, and always be addressed as those who, it is assumed, are conscious of their birthright and rejoice to own it before the world. They should be encouraged at the earliest possible age to be present at the stated services and prayer meetings of the church, and under direction of pastor or elders to take public part among their fellows in age in such social religious exercises. Above all, they should be impressed with the thought that there is no age at which they are too young to be the object of the Saviour's special tender care,

or, upon their part, as earnest, loving disciples, to give him their whole heart.

So soon as they have sufficient knowledge, and give evidence of sincere desire to come to the Lord's table, they should be informed that it is their privilege so to do.*

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* *Directory for Worship*, Chap. x, Sec. 1.

VII

Responsibilities and Privileges

ACCEPTING the foregoing conclusions, it is evident that great and peculiar responsibilities rest upon Christian parents; responsibilities that by no possibility can they delegate to others. To them is committed the nurture of the children of the Church —the infant disciples of Jesus—and upon their faithfulness depend, under God, the Christian life of these little ones, and, in large measure, the future of the Church itself.

They have no ground because of the baptism of these children for presumptuous self-satisfaction or a careless optimism in regard to them. So far from resting content in the thought that their offspring

have received the seal of baptism as an ecclesiastical ordinance, they are never to forget that the solemn rite has meaning only as signifying and presupposing the spiritual relation which it symbolizes, and that such spiritual relationship can be assured only by the grace of God who with foreknowledge of their prayers, their love, their watchfulness, their conscientious untiring zeal, responds to their faith by an anticipatory blessing, the greatest that can be accorded an immortal soul.

If, as is alas! too often the case, the parents are so thoroughly absorbed in the secular pursuits of the day—the increasing excitements of our driving business communities, or the dissipating follies of our fashionable social life—that they have "no time" to foster the spiritual life of their children, and no interest in directing their associations and forming their habits, what should they expect under the ordinary laws of God's realm, but that in after years they shall have tears to shed over

the wayward youth, the lost manhood, the frivolous womanhood, of those who were committed to their care ?

There may be also irreparable injury done simply from wrong convictions upon the part of parents.

If they assume that it is incredible that they should find their infant children already brought by the power of the Holy Spirit into a gracious state, and therefore urge unceasingly the futility of all attempts to live a Christian life until some new, sudden, and mysterious change has been experienced, they may lay a burden upon the young Christian life from which it will never be entirely relieved. A sudden and surprising illumination may perhaps be expected in the case of one who, like Saul, has been an open scoffer at the claims of Jesus, and then, like him, suddenly stricken down before the power of the cross; but far otherwise are the natural manifestations of religious life in one who, "born within the pale of the visi-

ble Church," has been brought up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

We have known little children who could not remember the time when they did not love their Saviour, pray earnestly, almost agonizingly, for some mysterious revelation, and then pause and wait in breathless expectancy for something to happen.

We have known men and women who professed to trust in Christ as a Saviour, and who gave every evidence of desiring to walk with him, pass on for years unwilling publicly to avow themselves Christians and take their place at the Lord's table, because they could not escape from the bondage of the conviction of the necessity of some new and violent revolution in feeling, a change that they had long despaired of ever experiencing.

But if the responsibilities are great the privileges are inestimable. What higher honor can be accorded to devout men and women than to have God's children in-

trusted to them to be trained within his kingdom! What greater privilege can be theirs than to pray with serene confidence for the signs of the Holy Spirit's presence, knowing that they shall not be disappointed! What more fascinating study than that of the peculiarities of temper and disposition of their little ones and of the methods and influences by which they may be counseled and guided aright! At times these privileges will assume a tender and all-absorbing interest. "Very young children religiously educated, it will be remembered by almost every grown-up person, have many times of great religious tenderness, when they are drawn apart in thoughtfulness and prayer. The effort should be to make these little silent pentecosts and gentle openings Godward, sealing-times of the Spirit, and have the family always in such keeping as to be a congenial element for such times; and to suffer no possible hindrance or opposing influence, even should they come and go

unobserved."* Thus guarding with watchful care the ripening soul, parents in all ordinary cases will not need to wait long before they will see even their imperfect work owned by God, cheered by the quick blossoming of gracious affections implanted by the Holy Spirit and early crowned by the voluntary consecration of their loved ones to the service of the blessed Master.

* Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, p. 383.

VIII

Encouragement

OUR Lord and Master, that he might touch all stages of human life and become the perfect example to the infant disciple as truly as to the aged saint, did not disdain to be born a helpless babe with every experience of increasing years still awaiting him. It is of him that the evangelist writes: "*And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.*"

The fullness of the meaning of such words as these when spoken of the Child Jesus we cannot undertake to explain: and yet, as the writer is manifestly speaking of the human side of our Lord's personality and his gradual development as a man it would seem that the reference is

not to supernatural qualities or gifts, but to that favor and blessing which the heavenly Father is ever ready to bestow upon all who yield their spirit to his guidance.

What imagination can picture the supreme loveliness of this holy Child who with the dew of youth upon his brow, the light of spotless purity in his eye, and the charm of ineffable tenderness in his gracious mien, is most vividly portrayed by the words: "*The grace of God was upon him*"?

Once only during these early years of our Lord is the curtain lifted, but it discloses a scene that pictures to the world the ideal of youth. It is the scene upon which Mary looked when, anxious and weary with her search, she pressed her way into the porch of the court of the temple and saw her Son sitting in the midst of the teachers, both hearing them and asking them questions. Many artists have attempted to depict the guileless face of the Child illumined with the light of the

grace of God; the grave yet wondering countenances of the encircling rabbis, and the tender, anxious face of the mother as she whispers her troubled question in the ear of her Son. But who can portray, either by artist's pencil or by spoken word a scene which is without parallel in the history of the world and which yet represents the Child Jesus as the type and symbol of all that youth ought to be, and toward which every child of man may by the grace of God aspire?

What more would be needed to prove that upon any one of our dear children rested the grace of God than to see developing in his ripening soul those three characteristics which in that temple scene are plainly manifest in the radiant person of the Son of Mary: an eager questioning after the truth, a willing submission to parental guidance, a solemn, joyful consecration to the service of the heavenly Father?

The grace of God, which finds its fruit-

age in such results, may be the dower of any child whose heart early goes out toward the divine Saviour and Master.

Of the tender sympathy of that divine Master what parent can doubt who remembers that the Son of Mary in his riper years took little infants in his arms and said: "Suffer little children to come unto m and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God."

Were the Church in a normal condition, herself answering to the ideal bride of the risen Lord, can we doubt that her children, upon whom rests the seal of the sacrament of baptism, would, one and all, growing up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, develop the rich graces of a consecrated Christian life?

Should not parents earnestly question themselves whether they really desire these heavenly gifts for their children? What thoughts most frequently fill their minds when they forecast the future of their little ones? Is it that they may be

prosperous and successful in worldly things, accumulate wealth, move in exclusive or fashionable circles of society, acquire position and fame? or that the grace of God may be upon them, and that they may know the joy of being about their Father's business?

If this latter is their sincere desire and earnest prayer, they may be assured that their earnest endeavor thus to influence their children will be owned and blessed on high, and that they will not fail of an exceeding great reward.

Finally, by such Christian nurture, as truly as by direct conquest from the world, God provides for the growth of his Church.

"Christian nurture, beginning in infancy, inheriting traditional influences, and surrounded at the first dawn of consciousness by a religious atmosphere, is the normal and divine method for propagating the Church. Of this method the baptism of infants is the visible exponent

and the mutual pledge between God and his believing people." *

He with whom is all power does not disclaim in his spiritual kingdom the same natural laws of parental influence by which from generation to generation nations are enlarged, and arts, sciences, and civilization, made more and more to cover the face of the globe. Because the Church has a glorious aggressive work to accomplish, attacking in the name of the Lord the strongholds of sin and Satan, and thus conquering the world for her King, she must not forget that her strength, her vigor, her triumph, depend still more upon her holy care of those whom God commits to her charge, to be cherished in her arms and nourished at her breast.

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* H. J Van Dyke, *The Church, Her Ministry and Sacraments*, p. 114.

APPENDIX

Note A. Page 10

History

At the present time a large number of very sincere and excellent Christians disapprove of the baptism of infants. But this number, though large in the aggregate, is relatively small, embracing less than one in fifty of the whole body of professed believers throughout the world.

As we go back in the history of the centuries, we find that the number of those who oppose the practice grows smaller and smaller, until in the sixteenth century they appear to be very few and to be universally regarded as heretics.

There is, however, a distinct record of the existence, among the Waldenses, in the twelfth century, of Christians called Petro-Brussians, who denied the propriety of baptizing infants.

Beyond this date the accounts of alleged dissent from the then universal practice are very obscure

and contradictory. Yet, as the records of the earlier centuries were in the hands of those who looked upon all dissent as rank heresy, it is not to be doubted, in view of the reports that have survived, that in every age there were Christians, more or less in number and more or less obscure in their lives, who contended that the baptism of infants was unscriptural and unauthorized. Still the number must have been very small during the earlier centuries, for Augustine, writing early in the fifth century, declares that he "never met with any Christian, either of the general Church or of any of the sects, nor with any writer who owned the authority of the Scriptures, who taught any other doctrine than that infants are to be baptized for the remission of sin;" and Pelagius asserts that he had "never heard of anyone, not even a heretic, who denied infant baptism." (See Hall, *Law of Baptism*, pp. 189, *et seq.*)

In the third and fourth centuries, although the necessity of baptizing infants was generally acknowledged, the practice was not uniform. (Question at council at Carthage, A.D. 252)

The references to infant baptism, earlier than the third century, are in dispute. When accepted as genuine they are interpreted according to the convictions of the inquirer. On the one side it is

held that the allusions prove the practice to have been novel and exceptional; on the other side it is insisted that they indicate its general prevalence.

It seems fair to accept the history as indicating such *consensus ecclesiae* as affords a presumption in favor of the practice. The argument for or against must be founded upon the Scriptures.

Note B. Page 16

Definitions of Regeneration

Misunderstanding frequently arises from mere difference of definition. Many Anglican divines, in supposed conformity to the expressions of their standards, use the word *regeneration* as signifying solely the change that takes place in the condition of a person who, by the sacrament, is "grafted into the good tree, born into the Church," and who receives "baptismal grace." But they do not deny the possibility of a previous spiritual change wrought by the Holy Ghost and manifested by faith and repentance; only they do not call it *regeneration*.

"Here again," says the bishop of Ely, "misunderstanding results from difference of definition. The Church calls the grace of baptism by the name of regeneration, for reasons already

specified; but she does not deny that God may work in the souls of men *previous to their baptism;* nay! she does not deny that there may be *true spiritual life* in them before baptism. But that spiritual life she does not call the new birth till it is manifested in the sacrament of regeneration. We must remember that the terms *new birth* and *regeneration* are images borrowed from natural objects and applied to spiritual objects. In nature we b lieve life to exist in the infant before it is born—life, too, of the same kind as its life after birth. Nay! *if there be no life before it is born there will be none after it is born.* So, the unbaptized may not be altogether destitute of spiritual life; yet the actual birth may be considered as taking place at baptism; when there is not only life, but life apparent, life proclaimed to the world; when the soul receives the seal of adoption, is counted in the family of God, and not only partakes of God's grace and mercy, but has a covenanted assurance and title to it."—*Browne's Exposition of Thirty-nine Articles*, p. 647.

Robertson of Brighton, after saying in words already quoted, that baptism makes a child a child of God only as coronation makes a sovereign, adds, "Baptism naturally stands in Scripture for the title of regeneration and the moment of it."

A prominent Lutheran clergyman writes: "In teaching the doctrine of baptismal regeneration our Church most emphatically rejects the error of those, like the Church of Rome, who teach (*the ex opere operato*) that the sacraments justify by the outward act. In the case of infants as they do not reject the grace offered in baptism the Holy Ghost works that receptive faith which justifies. In the case of adults our Church most positively teaches that the sacrament does not bestow blessings apart from personal faith. Through baptism the believer is ingrafted into Christ, receives the seal and assurance of forgiveness, and is entitled to the full blessings of salvation."—*The Rev. J. B. Remensnyder, D.D.*

Note C. Page 38

Elect Infants

The ambiguous statement of the Confession of Faith (Chap. X, Sec. 3) that "Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth" has doubtless in former days been a cause of anxiety and distress to parents who have lost infant children, it being interpreted as implying that there were infants dying

in infancy who were not saved. At the present time it is usually quoted only as an illustration of the alleged narrowness of vision of the framers of the symbol.

It should be remembered, however, that the statement was undoubtedly introduced into the Confession not with any primary intention of distinguishing between elect and nonelect infants, but as a protest against the Romish doctrine, that unbaptized infants were lost, and as an emphatic statement of the Protestant view of salvation through Christ alone. The emphasis is not upon the word "*elect*," but upon the words "*dying in infancy*." The chapter in which the statement occurs is not treating of *Election* but of *Effectual Calling*, and the antithesis is not between elect and nonelect, but between such of the former as die in infancy and such as live to be "outwardly called."

While it would be probably too much to say that there were none in that Assembly who doubted in regard to the salvation of all infants dying in infancy, it may be safely affirmed that in making this reference there was no deliberate purpose upon the part of the Assembly to formulate a dogmatic statement that by necessary implication would teach that any infants dying in infancy are lost.

Note D. Page 42

The Mode of Baptism

To the present writer the question of the original mode of baptism, whether by sprinkling, affusion, immersion, or submersion, has never seemed to have the importance attached to it by many others.

Even could it be proved that the sacrament in apostolic times was administered only in one mode, and also, as some affirm, that the word "baptize" (Greek *βαπτίζω*) signified only immersion (or, more exactly, submersion), it would not appear to him conclusively proved that the same mode was essential in all ages to the validity of the sacrament.

As, however, reasons for this opinion, that to him appear conclusive, would probably be challenged by those who differ with him as to the proper practice, he would add that he by no means admits that it can be proved that in apostolic times the sacrament was administered exclusively by immersion, much less by submersion, which is the contention of a large and influential branch of the Church to-day.

The difficulties in the way of establishing this contention are obvious, and have been often enu-

merated. Aside from the proverbial difficulty of proving a negative, and the valid presumption arising from the immemorial practice of the large majority of Christians, the following points may be noted:—

1. The *a priori* improbability of appointing a necessary rite in a form that would be frequently inconvenient and at times impracticable, as, for example, in mortal illness, or in the Arctic regions.

2. The fact that historically there is no record back to apostolic days of any period in which baptism was administered only by submersion.

3. The earliest delineations, such as the rude pictorial representations in the Catacombs, indicate baptism by affusion.

4. The directions concerning baptism in the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (ΔΙΔΑΧΗ), a document dating back to the second century, "possibly as far back as A.D. 120, hardly later than A.D. 160." The seventh chapter reads: "Now, concerning baptism, thus baptize ye: having first uttered all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in running water. But if thou hast not running water, baptize in other water; and if thou canst not in cold, *then* in warm. But if thou hast neither, pour water upon the head

thrice into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." (See translation by R. D. Hitchcock and Francis Brown, pages 15, 33.)

5. The extreme improbability, in view of the absence (aside from public reservoirs) of large pools of water or sufficient streams, that in one day (Pentecost) in Jerusalem three thousand persons were baptized by submersion.

6. That although the ordinary meaning of the Greek word *βαπτω*, and (apart from ceremonial usage) of its derivative *βαπτίζω*, is "to dip" or "to immerse" (not necessarily *submerge*), it can hardly be successfully maintained that in the Hellenistic Greek of the Septuagint and the New Testament it so invariably means to *submerge* completely, that therefore any act short of submersion invalidates the sacrament.

A few illustrations will suffice. In all of them submersion is very improbable, and in some of them practically excluded.

Ecclesiasticus (Apocrypha) xxxiv. 25: "He that washeth himself (*βαπτιζομενος*) because of a dead body"—an evident reference to the ceremonial cleansing by sprinkling commanded in Numbers xix. 18: "And a clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it . . . . upon him that touched . . . . one dead." It may

be noticed also that the word "dip," with reference to the hyssop is in the Septuagint "βαψει," which may mean immerse but hardly *submerge*.

Daniel iv. 33 (Septuagint iv. 30): "And he [Nebuchadnezzar] was driven from men, ... and his body was wet (ἐβάφη) with the dew of heaven.

Mark vii. 4: "And when they come from the marketplace, except they wash (βαπτίσωνται, but in some manuscripts ραντισωνται) they eat not: and many other things, ... as the washing (βαπτισμοὺς) of cups, ... and of tables (κλινῶν—*couches or beds*.) (Omitted in some manuscripts).

Luke xi. 38: "And when the Pharisee saw it, he marveled that he [Jesus] had not first washed (εβαπτίσθη) before dinner."

To the present writer the probabilities seem to be that very early in the Hellenistic usage the word "*baptize*," when used with ceremonial reference, acquired a ritualistic meaning nearly parallel to "cleanse" or "lustrate," and that the mode of administration in early post-apostolic days, while perhaps more frequently by immersion, was in numerous exceptional cases by affusion or pouring, the administrator and the recipient standing together in the stream from which the water was dipped (see Teaching of the Apostles, as above). In the New Testament there is no intimation of

the mode of baptism excepting as it is inferred from the meaning of the word.

But as has been already suggested, the question of the mode of baptism is of little importance as compared with that of the proper subjects. There is no branch of the Church that prohibits the administration of the sacrament by submersion, if from conscientious scruples the applicant desires that method.

NOTE E. PAGE 43

Meaning of Anglican Baptismal Office

In the Church of England and in the Protestant Episcopal Church in this country there has always been a wide diversity of opinion as to the significance of the expression: "*Seeing now that this child is regenerate.*" C. W. Andrews, D.D., remarks: "This regeneration is pronounced upon the profession of *faith* by the child himself which immediately precedes. It is not the sponsor who professes faith, but the child by the sponsor, and this, not that he *will* believe, but that he *then* believes. The faith is *admitted* to be hypothetical, regeneration is the corresponding hypothesis. The faith is as positively professed as the regeneration is pronounced. The construction of the service upon the hypothetical principle may be unwise, but that it *was* constructed on that princi-

ple is most certain."—*Baptismal Regeneration, by E. Mellor, D.D., Note*, p. 64.

"Of those infants, therefore, who have been baptized, we do not *hope*, but we *know*, that as they are partakers of the covenant of grace, so they are partakers of the assurance of pardon, and, moreover, have a right to those graces of the Holy Spirit, which if cultivated as they grow up, will surely new-create in them a sanctified nature, mortifying and destroying their old and corrupt nature, and making them sons of God indeed. Hence as they are by baptism entitled to regenerating grace, we do not scruple to use the language of Scripture and antiquity, and to call them regenerate in baptism."—*Browne on the Thirty-nine Articles*, p. 676.

"Regeneration is a change of our *spiritual condition*, a translation into a state in which our *salvation is rendered possible:* renovation is that change of heart and life by which salvation is finally attained."—*Bishop J. H. Hobart, Works*, vol. ii, p. 472.

"Since then baptismal regeneration confers only a conditional title to the blessings of the Christian covenant, and pledges and conveys only that grace which is necessary to the fulfillment of these conditions, it is a misapprehension

or a misstatement of this doctrine which represents it as denying or superseding the necessity of that spiritual change which it sets forth and enforces. —*Idem*, p. 62.

"This Babel-like confusion [in interpretation] has resulted from the attempt to make the Office speak what its framers did not intend, and from overlooking the principle on which it is constructed, *the principle of a legal fiction*. . . . . The infant is represented as an intelligent voluntary party to the covenant of salvation—and the conditions of the covenant and the promises and blessings are fully set forth. It is the infant who renounces sin, professes faith, desires baptism, and promises obedience. It is not the promise and profession of the sponsors."—*Bishop Alfred Lee, Review of the Bishop of New York's Pastoral Letter*, p. 24.

The bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church in this country, in the council of the General Convention of 1871, made the following declaration: "Being asked to declare our conviction as to the meaning of the word 'regenerate' in the Offices for the ministration of baptism to infants, we do declare that in our opinion, the word 'regenerate' is not there so used as to determine that a moral change in the subject of baptism is wrought in that sacrament."

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